



CHAPTER THREE

Checklists: Leading a team

D – To check in with staff effectively, ensure you:

- Make time each day to speak to members of your team, even if only briefly.
- Learn key information about your team members and follow up on previous conversations.
- Ask about both professional and personal matters where appropriate, showing genuine interest.
- Notice changes in mood, workload, confidence or behaviour and check in where necessary.
- Make yourself visible within the department each day.
- Use corridor conversations to identify concerns before they become larger issues.
- Ensure newer members of staff receive regular contact and support.
- Listen carefully to concerns raised and avoid immediately jumping to solutions.
- Keep a mental note of important events, responsibilities or commitments that matter to members of your team.
- Use daily conversations to build trust rather than only speaking to staff when something has gone wrong.

D – To model the behaviour you expect from your team, be prepared to:

- Arrive prepared and organised for meetings, lessons and key department events.
- Follow the systems and expectations that you ask your team to implement.
- Remain calm and professional when challenges arise, particularly during periods of pressure.
- Demonstrate the standards you expect through your own teaching, communication and conduct.
- Speak positively about students, colleagues and the wider school community.
- Be visible and approachable so that staff can see the values you are promoting in action.
- Accept feedback openly and show a willingness to reflect and improve your own practice.
- Remember that your actions will often have a greater influence than your words.

D – When making decisions as a middle leader, focus on:

- Gather information from a range of sources before reaching a conclusion.
- Consider the impact of decisions on students, staff and the wider department.
- Seek the views of your team where appropriate, particularly when decisions affect their daily practice.
- Remain focused on the long-term vision of the department rather than short-term convenience.
- Be prepared to explain the rationale behind your decisions clearly and honestly.



Five Steps Ahead

- Accept that not every decision will please everyone, but ensure they are fair and purposeful.
- Review the impact of important decisions and adapt where necessary.

W – When getting to know your team, make time to:

- Learn about the professional strengths, interests and expertise of each member of your department.
- Understand the ambitions and career goals of your team members.
- Take an interest in the lives of colleagues beyond the classroom where appropriate.
- Recognise that different team members may require different levels of support, challenge or autonomy.
- Identify the skills and experiences that individuals can contribute to the department.
- Follow up on previous conversations and demonstrate that you value what colleagues share with you.
- Consider individual circumstances when making decisions that affect workload or responsibilities.
- Invest time in building relationships before you need to rely on them during challenging periods.

T – To reduce unnecessary workload and support staff wellbeing:

- Identify the tasks that are consuming the greatest amount of staff time.
- Audit existing department systems and remove processes that are creating duplication.
- Centralise resources, key information and documentation where possible.
- Create shared approaches to recurring tasks such as assessments, intervention and revision.
- Regularly ask staff which systems are helping and which are creating unnecessary workload.
- Review new initiatives carefully before introducing them to ensure they are worth the time investment.
- Use department meetings to identify workload pinch points and agree practical solutions.
- Remember that reducing workload should create more time for high-quality teaching, not lower expectations.

T – When supporting non-specialists within your department:

- Meet with non-specialists before they begin teaching a unit to discuss key content and expectations.
- Identify the areas of the curriculum that may require additional support or explanation.
- Share curriculum plans, resources and examples of high-quality student work.
- Highlight common misconceptions and areas where students often struggle.
- Provide opportunities for non-specialists to ask questions and discuss upcoming lessons.
- Check in regularly throughout the year rather than assuming support is only needed at the start.



Five Steps Ahead

- Encourage non-specialists to share strengths from their own subject areas where appropriate.
- Review how effectively the support is working and adapt it where necessary.

Y – When managing staff absence within your department, try to:

- Ensure key curriculum resources, plans and documents are stored centrally and can be accessed easily.
- Have clear systems in place so that lessons can continue with minimal disruption.
- Communicate promptly with the team when additional support or cover arrangements are required.
- Consider how workload can be distributed fairly when colleagues are covering lessons or responsibilities.
- Prioritise the tasks that are most important for maintaining consistency for students.
- Support returning staff by helping them catch up on key information, decisions and department developments.
- Be mindful that both short-term and long-term absences can place additional pressure on a team.
- Focus on maintaining stability for students whilst supporting the wellbeing of all staff involved.

Y – When addressing conflict within your team, you should:

- Gather information from all parties involved before reaching conclusions.
- Address concerns promptly rather than allowing frustrations to grow over time.
- Focus discussions on behaviours, actions and solutions rather than personalities.
- Listen carefully to all perspectives and ensure colleagues feel heard.
- Remain calm, professional and impartial throughout the process.
- Encourage colleagues to work towards a shared resolution that benefits the department and its students.
- Keep appropriate records of significant conversations or agreed actions where necessary.
- Follow up after the situation has been resolved to ensure relationships and working practices remain positive.

T – When creating opportunities for the team to socialise outside of school, ensure you :

- Offer opportunities for staff to spend time together outside of formal meetings and school events.
- Ensure activities are inclusive and accessible to all members of the team.
- Recognise that colleagues may have different commitments, interests and comfort levels.
- Avoid placing pressure on staff to attend or making them feel excluded if they choose not to.
- Consider a range of activities rather than relying on the same type of event each time.
- Use social opportunities to strengthen relationships and build trust across the department.



Five Steps Ahead

- Be mindful of department dynamics and ensure events remain welcoming and positive.
- Remember that strong teams are built through genuine relationships, not compulsory attendance.

Y – When writing a Department Improvement Plan:

- Begin by identifying the key priorities that will have the greatest impact on students and staff.
- Use a range of evidence, including outcomes, curriculum review, staff feedback and quality assurance activities, to inform your priorities.
- Limit the number of priorities so that the plan remains realistic and achievable.
- Define the intended impact of each priority before deciding on the actions required.
- Break priorities into clear actions with measurable milestones throughout the year.
- Ensure responsibilities are shared appropriately across the team rather than sitting solely with the Head of Department.
- Review progress regularly and adapt actions where evidence suggests a different approach is needed.
- Remember that a Department Improvement Plan should drive daily actions, not exist as a document that is only revisited during review meetings.